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SUBJECT: JAMAICAN REACTION TO GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY
REPORT (GAO) ON CARIBBEAN PORT SECURITY

Summary

¶1. (SBU) The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) is required to report on security related aspects of Caribbean Basin Ports. On June 29, 2007 the GAO released a report, "Information on Port Security in the Caribbean Basin", in which they identified three likely modes of attack and three specific areas of security concern and vulnerability. The Jamaican reaction to the GAO report has been limited but resentful. Jamaicans, including James Forbes, head of security at the Port Authority of Jamaica, were critical of the GAO report's lack of specificity. Many federal agencies located within U.S. Embassy Kingston, were also concerned about the report's broad labeling of Caribbean ports without distinguishing among specific countries. While many of the concerns identified may apply to other islands in the Caribbean, Jamaica seems to have made a concerted effort to comply and in some instances exceed international regulations regarding port security. The Jamaican media does not seem to recognize the distinction between this report emanating from an independent nonpartisan agency that works for Congress, and an official statement of U.S. Government policy and views. End Summary

GAO Report

¶2. (SBU) Section 233 (c) of the security and accountability for Every Port Act of 2006 compels the GAO to inform Congress of port security in the Caribbean Basin. It is important for Congress to be aware of the security situation regarding ports in the Caribbean Basin because American cruise ships and goods travel to and from this region. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report, "Information on Port Security in the Caribbean Basin" (www.gao.gov), with the specific objectives of identifying and describing: (1) the threats and concerns to port security within the Caribbean Basin, (2) actions taken by foreign and domestic agents to meet international port regulations, (3) actions US government agencies have taken to assist in making Caribbean ports secure, and (4) the potential economic consequences of port security and a hypothetical attack.

¶3. (SBU) The GAO acquired interview officials from federal agencies and international organizations, and also visited several Caribbean nations GAO reviewed information provided by those agencies and organizations working in the region. Based on the three areas of analysis in the aforementioned

section, the GAO found three areas that specifically inhibit port security in the Caribbean Basin: (1) corruption, (2) gang activity in close proximity to ports, and (3) drug trafficking. Illegal migration and a growing influence of Islamic radical groups were also mentioned by agency officials as potential concerns to port security.

¶4. (SBU) However, according to the GAO, its report is "descriptive in nature and does not provide a detailed analysis of the actions taken or efforts made regarding port security in the Caribbean Basin." Therefore, the GAO report merely describes the port security situation in general without taking into consideration actions taken to address the security concerns mentioned above. The report also does not address the effectiveness of the programs implemented by Federal or any other agencies to address the security concerns raised in the report.

Jamaican reaction

¶5. (SBU) The Jamaican reaction to the GAO report can be described as limited but resentful. In the media, there have been a few articles concerning references to the GAO report. One editorial made the front page of the "Daily Observer", one of the major periodicals read island-wide, on July 7, 2007, with the title, "'Our Ports Secure' Port Authority responds to U.S. Congress Concern." The article included comments from James Forbes, head of the security at the Port Authority of Jamaica, who was specifically disgruntled at the claims of corruption, lax security, and limited resources to maintain equipment. The GAO seems to have given rise to some

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confusion that was expressed in an analysis column in the Daily Observer on July 15, 2007 entitled "Two elections and 'Uncle Same'." The columnist, Rickey Singh, expressed dismay regarding the critique of port security coming on the heels of the CARICOM 20/20 Summit at which Caribbean nations and the U.S. agreed to move forward collectively on issues of security.

¶6. (SBU) Mr. Forbes expressed disgruntlement at the GAO report's findings because Jamaica appears to have addressed many of the concerns mentioned by the GAO as a threat to security. Forbes claims the Port Authority of Jamaica is audited internally, and the Port Authority also has been audited by the U.S. Coast Guard and other international agencies that have found the Port Authority's financial practices to be above board. Forbes is also quoted as saying that not only saying the Port Authority possesses equipment that only scan 100% of all cargo, but Jamaica is the only country in the region with the capacity to scan cargo with high-tech x-ray equipment that can peer through 12 inches of solid steel. The three major ports on the island, Kingston, Montego Bay, and Ocho Rios, are operated by both local police and Jamaica Defense Force. Forbes did not address the issue of growing Islamic radical influence in the region. However, the Islamic community in Jamaica is very small.

Federal Agency Reactions

¶7. (SBU) Federal agencies operating in the area have positive reviews of the efforts by the Jamaican government to secure the ports. In the estimate of the Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section, the management of Jamaican ports, headed by Noel Hylton, does not appear to be corrupt. Narcotics Affairs also believes the Jamaica Defence Force does not seem to be corrupt in comparison to other law enforcement agencies in Jamaica. The Defense AttachQ's Office (DAO) could not comment on other ports in Jamaica but specifically mentioned the port in Kingston as secure and compliance with international

guidelines/standards. The Department of Homeland security Container Security Initiative, Kingston, also has found that the Kingston port is secure. Some of the security measures noted by the Container Security Initiative, a program active in other Caribbean Islands, included: (1) having a Jamaican Customs Officer present when someone enters the container area, (2) having a customs officer present when the seal of a container is broken, (3) and all vehicles that enter the port are required to sign in and out. The consensus opinion of Federal agencies operating in Kingston is that the ports here are secure.

Comment

18. (U) The report's lack of specificity leads some countries like Jamaica to believe, by virtue of being part of the region to which the GAO report refers that their situations are mischaracterized and their efforts to cooperate with us on port security are not appreciated. Jamaicans sometimes do not recognize the difference between the executive and legislative branches in the U.S. Government or the independent, non-partisan nature of an organization like the GAO that is charged with keeping the legislative branch informed of how the executive spends money. They interpret a report such as this as an authoritative statement of U.S. views
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